

Bristol Harbour Business Plan

2026–2031



 Bristol
 Harbour

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Executive Summary	4
3. Business Overview	5
4. Revenue Streams	7
5. Cost Structure	8
6. Business Strategy	9
7. Development and Project Plan.	10
8. Priorities and Actions.	11
9. Team and Management.	12
10. Financial Budgets and Forecast	13
11. Monitoring and Governance.	17
12. Summary Outlook.	18

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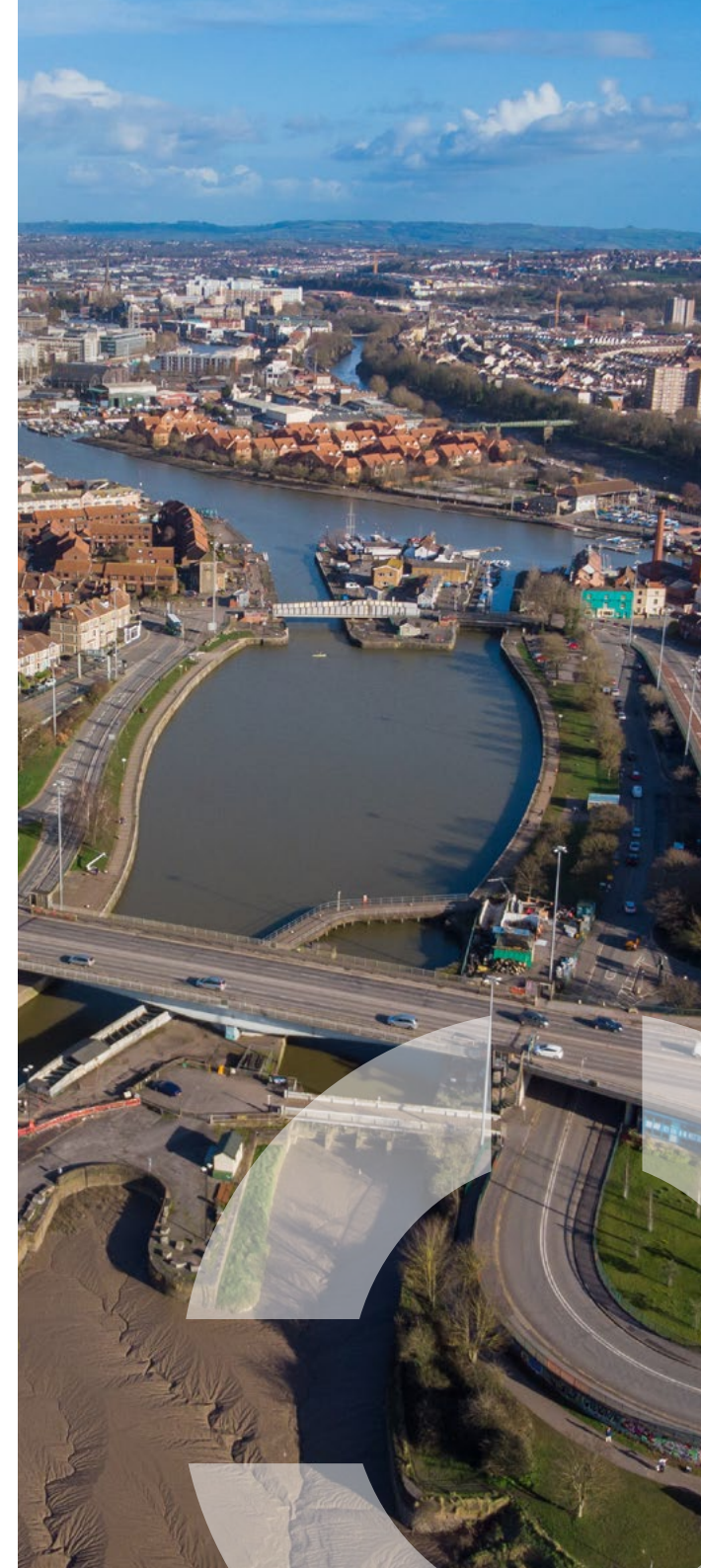
1. Introduction

Bristol Harbour, a historic and iconic waterway at the heart of the city, is entering a pivotal period of transformation. This period is defined not only by the pressures of financial sustainability and infrastructure renewal but by the remarkable opportunity to re-imagine the Harbour’s role in the life of the city – as a civic engine, a commercial platform, and a cultural beacon.

Long treasured by residents and admired by visitors, the Harbour has long played a central role in shaping Bristol’s identity, economy, and sense of place. It is a living, working waterfront – home to marine activity, heritage assets, cultural institutions, creative industries, green infrastructure, and public spaces. However, its continued vitality is not guaranteed.

This Business Plan sets out a bold and pragmatic roadmap for transforming Bristol Harbour into a financially self-sustaining, environmentally resilient, and publicly cherished asset by 2031. Building on the vision set out in the Harbour Strategic Plan, the plan provides an integrated framework for operational renewal, commercial growth, and strategic investment. It is both an action plan and a commitment – to excellence in delivery, inclusiveness in impact, and accountability in governance.

Crucially, the plan aligns with the broader strategic goals of Bristol City Council – supporting citywide ambitions around inclusive growth, net-zero transitions, improved public realm, and community well-being. The Harbour will serve not only as a maritime district, but as a model for civic innovation, sustainable infrastructure, and partnership-led regeneration.





2. Executive Summary

Bristol Harbour currently faces an operational deficit of £767,000 in the 2025/26 fiscal year, with anticipated revenues of £3.75 million against costs of £4.52 million. Without intervention, this deficit threatens the Harbour’s operational sustainability, limits its ability to invest in vital infrastructure, and constrains its potential as a public and economic asset.

This Business Plan along with a five-year strategy sets out a viable route to eliminate the deficit and establish a sustainable operating model by 2031, based on three interdependent strategic pillars:

- **Optimising Marine Services** – Delivering safe, high-quality, and commercially viable marine operations with improved capacity, pricing models, and digital efficiency.
- **Maximising Value from Estate Assets** – Unlocking the latent potential of land and buildings through proactive asset management, adaptive reuse, and placemaking-led regeneration.
- **Positioning the Harbour as a Premier Destination** – Leveraging the Harbour’s historic character and cultural vibrancy to grow the visitor economy, host major events, and drive inclusive economic activity.

All strategies are underpinned by an unwavering commitment to public value, climate resilience, flood risk mitigation, and equitable access. As a result, the Harbour will become a net contributor to Bristol’s economic, environmental, and social fabric – both resilient and regenerative as opposed to a reliance on the wider council to fund repairs and replacement of critical infrastructure. The aim of this plan is to operate at a surplus which can then be invested into capital projects to conserve the harbour.



3. Business Overview

Governance

Bristol Harbour is owned by Bristol City Council and administered by Bristol Harbour Authority. It operates under a statutory harbour authority framework, ensuring compliance with maritime law and alignment with wider local government responsibilities. This integrated model enables joined-up decision-making across planning, infrastructure, environment, tourism, and economic development. An enhanced governance structure – including a future decision-making Harbour Committee. Panel – will further strengthen transparency, cross-sector collaboration, and stakeholder engagement.

Conservancy and Safety

The statutory duty to ensure navigational safety remains at the core of Harbour operations. Key functions include patrolling, licensing, regulatory enforcement, and asset management. These conservancy responsibilities are foundational to public trust and commercial activity and will continue to be prioritised through investment in systems, training, and equipment.

Environmental Commitment

Environmental responsibility is embedded across Harbour functions. With a firm commitment to the Council’s Climate Emergency response, the Harbour will aim to deliver measurable action in decarbonisation, biodiversity protection, water quality, and green infrastructure. These measures align with regional and national climate adaptation goals, with a particular focus on sustainable marine practices, mooring infrastructure, and habitat enhancement.

Harbour Infrastructure and Assets

The Harbour’s physical estate spans critical infrastructure including locks, swing bridges, quay walls, heritage structures, moorings and its dock side estates. These assets form the operational backbone of the Harbour but require continuous maintenance and strategic investment. Upgrading this infrastructure is essential to ensure operational resilience, protect heritage value, and support long-term economic and community benefit.

Commercial Overview

As a hybrid civic-commercial enterprise, the Harbour must balance public service with financial viability. Revenue generation is integral to reinvest in operations, public benefit, and infrastructure. The Harbour’s income is drawn from a diverse portfolio of marine fees, estate rents and partnerships, parking charges and tourism activity. The Harbour’s ability to generate income while safeguarding its ecological and community value is central to its future success. As such, commercial activity is focused on sustainable growth, reinvestment, and innovation in service delivery.



4. Revenue Streams

Marine Services

Marine activities form the financial and operational core of Harbour services. Revenue will grow through:

- Revised mooring tariffs reflecting service improvements and demand.
- Expansion of visitor, residential, leisure and commercial berths.
- Increased licensing income through updated schedules and digital systems.
- Introduction of marine consultancy services, offering technical expertise to other harbours and partners.

Dockside and Estate Management

The strategic management of Harbour-owned land assets will provide long-term commercial value through:

- Leasehold income / shared interest from commercial, operational, and cultural tenants.
- Joint ventures, enabling regeneration of priority sites such as Waterfront Place.
- Paid parking, including surface and structured locations.
- Venue hire, for waterfront events, filming, and temporary exhibitions.
- Concessions, including food, beverage, and retail offerings.
- Improved operational efficiencies by implementing a new asset management system.

Events and Tourism

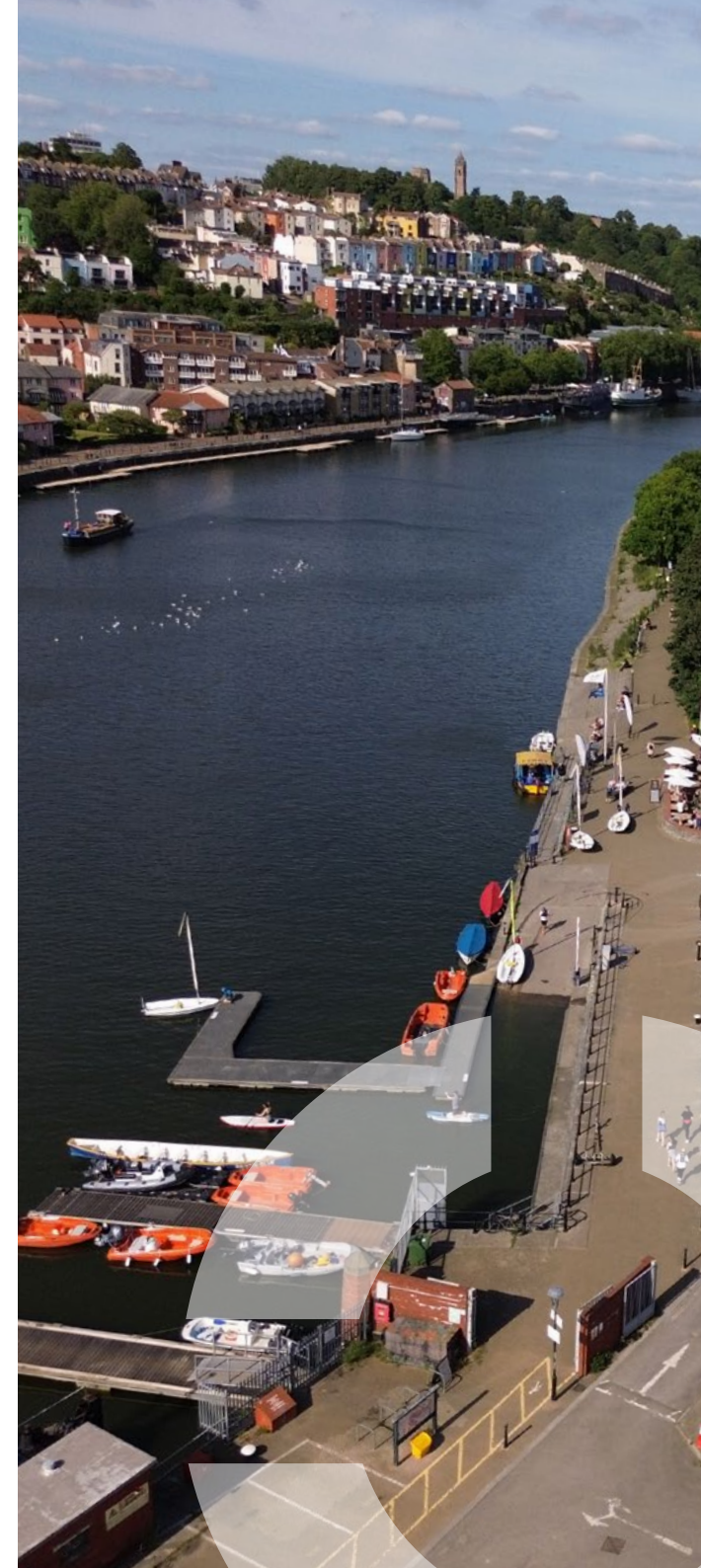
Cultural programming and tourism activation are growing sources of revenue and citywide value:

- Ticketed events, including maritime festivals, music and cultural performances, and regattas.
- Filming hire, tapping into Bristol's creative reputation and cinematic appeal.
- Waterfront tourism packages, such as boat tours, heritage trails, and guided experiences.
- Collaborative programming, co-produced with local organisations to support arts, heritage, and inclusive participation.
- Parking charges from the car parks that fall within the boundary of the Harbour.

5. Cost Structure

The Harbour's operating costs reflect its complexity as a marine, cultural, and infrastructural entity. Key cost centres include:

- Core infrastructure maintenance and where necessary, replacement: dredging, lock gates, swing bridges, harbour walls.
- Staffing: marine operations, engineering, estate management, IT, commercial development, and administration.
- Council support services: finance, legal, HR, communications and procurement.
- Equipment and materials for marine and estate works.
- Transport, utilities, and premises management.
- Office support, systems, and supplies.
- Digital systems, data platforms and adoption of council wide Corporate Landlord model.
- Marketing and destination promotion.
- Subsidised cultural and public events.



6. Business Strategy

Objectives:

- Achieve financial sustainability and revenue growth
- Maintain, develop and improve harbour infrastructure and operations
- Secure an environmentally sustainable and resilient future
- Grow tourism, leisure and events portfolio
- Promote Bristol Harbour's profile
- Strengthen relationships with stakeholders
- Embrace green technologies and the Smart Ports Initiative
- Strengthen safety and regulatory compliance.



7. Development and Project Plan

Planned activities for the 2026–2031 period include:

- Invest any capital income into long-term revenue generation projects.
 - Delivery of critical repair and phased renewal of core assets (bridges, lock systems, quaysides, sluices etc).
 - Expansion of mooring infrastructure to meet forecast demand.
 - Upgrade of visitor and long-term mooring facilities (electricity, water, waste, digital access).
 - Capital co-investment with commercial tenants for estate improvements.
 - Activation of underused or dormant Harbour land for meanwhile or permanent uses.
- Integration and collaboration of Western Harbour, Temple Quarter and Bristol and Avon Flood Defence development zones to align with regeneration and mobility infrastructure plans.





8. Priorities and Actions

- Secure cross-departmental alignment with Bristol City Council to fund maintenance of crucial infrastructure, adequate staffing, and capital improvements for the life of this plan.
- A sustained public relations, marketing and promotion of commercial opportunities to include leisure, live-aboard and visitor moorings.
- Establish new commercial moorings for a range of activities in priority areas (Mardyke, Harbour Inlet, Amphitheatre, Narrow Quay, Bush Corner, Wapping Wharf, The Grove, Bathurst Basin, St Augustine’s Reach, Totterdown Basin, Temple Backs and the Feeder Canal from Netham Lock).
- Establish new live-aboard, leisure and visitor moorings in line with projected demand.
- Wherever possible, upgrade pontoons, access ramps, boaters’ facilities and wastewater disposal. This will be in a planned program of work that is outlined in our annual service plan.
- Assess the viability of introducing other water-based structures such as floating accommodation, etc.
- Wherever possible introduce more eco systems, such as that at Capricorn Quay.
- Enable meanwhile uses on development sites (e.g. Redcliffe Wharf, The Grove west end, Waterfront Place).
- Support flexible event and filming use in designated zones (Amphitheatre, Waterfront Square, Hannover Quay and the floating Harbour).
- Explore creative activation of Redcliffe Caves and quayside locations.
- Explore partial redevelopment of Avon Quay and other areas identified in the Place Making Strategy.

9. Team and Management

The delivery of this Business Plan depends on a capable and well-coordinated multidisciplinary team:

- **Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration**
- **Director Management of Place**
- **Director / Harbour Master** – overall strategic and operational leadership.
- **Harbour Operations Manager/s** – leads marine services, moorings, safety, supported by Marine Service Supervisors, Officers and annual casual staff.
- **Principal Engineering Manager** – responsible for design, delivery, and maintenance of infrastructure, supported by a team of engineers and seasonal workers.
- **Estates Manager** – manages Harbour estates and operations with a team of estates operatives.
- **Project Manager** – oversees project timelines, budget tracking, and cross-team delivery.
- **Business Development Manager** – drives commercial strategy, partnerships, and investment.
- **Ecological and Climate Officer** – leads on sustainability, biodiversity, and resilience initiatives (subject to funding).
- **Office Manager** – ensures day-to-day administrative support, supported by business officers.



10. Financial Budgets and Forecast

Expenditure	Baseline					
	2025–26	2026–27	2027–28	2028–29	2029–30	2030–31
Employees	(1,965,976)	(2,168,977)	(2,191,562)	(2,257,309)	(2,325,029)	(2,394,779)
Repairs and Maintenance	(651,739)	(651,739)	(694,102)	(703,125)	(735,469)	(1,029,016)
Utilities	(359,964)	(370,763)	(381,886)	(393,342)	(405,143)	(417,297)
Business Rates	(324,773)	(334,516)	(344,552)	(354,888)	(365,535)	(376,501)
Street Cleansing	(244,586)	(251,924)	(259,481)	(267,266)	(275,284)	(283,542)
Premises	(158,093)	(162,836)	(167,721)	(172,752)	(177,935)	(183,273)
Equipment and Materials	(74,583)	(111,820)	(115,175)	(134,080)	(189,603)	(128,341)
Consultancy / Legal	(50,000)	(51,500)	(53,045)	(54,636)	(56,275)	(57,964)
Marketing and Promotion	(11,800)	(72,154)	(33,119)	(34,112)	(35,136)	(36,190)
Grounds Maintenance (Parks)	(82,208)	(84,674)	(87,214)	(89,831)	(92,526)	(95,302)
Waste collection / recycling	(38,000)	(39,140)	(40,314)	(41,524)	(42,769)	(44,052)
Corporate Landlord	(33,100)	(34,093)	(35,116)	(36,169)	(37,254)	(38,372)
Car Parks (SLA Management)	(28,994)	(29,864)	(30,760)	(31,683)	(32,633)	(33,612)
Transport (vehicles/vessels)	(20,876)	(21,502)	(22,147)	(22,812)	(23,496)	24,201)
Pest Control	(12,000)	(12,360)	(12,731)	(13,113)	(13,506)	(13,911)
Tree Maintenance	(12,000)	(12,360)	(12,731)	(13,113)	(13,506)	(13,911)
BCC Support Services	(307,750)	(316,983)	(326,492)	(336,287)	(346,375)	(356,767)
Bad Debt Provision	(47,975)	(100,446)	(107,290)	(113,800)	(121,890)	(155,946)
Docks Dredging (transfer to reserve/part fund cost of works)	(93,000)	(93,000)	(103,000)	(113,000)	(123,000)	(133,000)
Total Expenditure	(4,517,417)	(4,920,651)	(5,018,438)	(5,182,842)	(5,412,364)	(5,815,977)

Income	Baseline 2025–26	2026–27	2027–28	2028–29	2029–30	2030–31
Harbour Estate (rents, licencing, events, filming)	1,329,848	1,583,000	1,515,000	1,516,000	1,584,000	2,420,000
Marine Services (moorings, licensing, permits)	1,084,919	1,235,891	1,489,417	1,664,436	1,817,564	1,944,596
Docks Engineering (Flood defence, consultancy)	135,000	25,000	35,000	45,000	55,000	65,000
Car Parks (pay and display fees, permits)	1,186,388	1,221,980	1,358,639	1,439,398	1,482,580	1,527,058
Pavilion Venue Hire	15,587	26,000	26,000	26,000	26,000	26,000
Total Income	3,751,742	4,091,871	4,424,056	4,690,834	4,965,144	5,982,654
Net (deficit) / surplus to reserve for infrastructure repairs/improvements	(765,675)	(828,780)	(594,381)	(492,009)	(447,219)	166,677
Required contribution from General Fund	765,675	828,780	594,381	492,009	447,219	0
Total including GF support	0	0	0	0	0	166,677
Capital / Balance sheet fund						
Capital Expenditure (funded by capital receipt)		300,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
Baltic Wharf Capital Receipt (reducing balance)	(1,600,000)	(1,300,000)	(1,100,000)	(900,000)	(700,000)	(500,000)
Docks Dredging Reserve (BEO73) - closing balance	(294,000)	(187,000)	(290,000)	(153,000)	(276,000)	(159,000)
Bristol Harbour General Reserve (BX268)	(20,000)	(20,000)	(20,000)	(20,000)	(20,000)	(20,000)
	(1,914,000)	(1,207,000)	(1,210,000)	(873,000)	(796,000)	(479,000)

Business Plan Assumptions

Year 25/26

£1.6M income from Baltic Wharf

Year 26/27 (in brackets are subsequent years)

Costs

Salaries uplift by 3% year on year.

Additional staff – 1 x Business Development Manager Year 1. 1 x Ecological Officer Year 2 (subject to funding).

Repairs and Maintenance budgets – no increase for Y1 then (6.5%) (1.3%) (4.6%) (10%) with additional £220k added from surplus in Y5

Costs rows A4 – A9 increase by 3% and same for subsequent years

Fleet, equipment and materials increase by (35k) (35k) (50k) (100k) (35k)

Consultancy /Legal Fees 50K. Bad debt provision 3.5% of income, excluding parking and same subsequent years

Budgeted transfer to Docks Dredging reserve increases by 10k pa from Y2 onwards

Costs rows A11 – A18 increase by 3% and subsequent years

Marketing and Promotion increases to (72K) than decreases for subsequent years

Income

Increase income from Harbour Estate to... 1.39m, 1.445m, 1.446m, 1.496m, 1.550m

Increase car parking income 3% year on year

£100k pa additional parking income (charging for parking on docks land where vehicles currently park free)

Additional marine income by 3.5% inflation year on year

Additional marine income by £100k (Little Venice Moorings), (£150k year 2) then £200k each subsequent year

Additional marine income by £40k (Capricorn Quay moorings), then (£50k) (£60k) (£60k) (£75k)

Additional marine income (more leisure, visitor, winter and live-aboard moorings take-up) £35k year 1 then (£40k) (£50k) (£60k) (£75k)

Additional marine income by £50k pa from Y2 for increased moorings/vacancy reduction

Increase in Docks Estate income £800k year 5. £18k built in for Y4 as likely to start from early 2030

Crest Nicholson – £193k for Y1 only (one-off funding for improvements to public realm)

Watershed income – £20k pa.

Long term Residential Mooring licences – additional income

For 26/27 you can add £28,000 to the long term residential moorings

For 28/29 add £16,000

For 31/32 add £10,000

For 32/33 add £10,000

Commercial mooring licences – additional income

For 26/27 add £10,000

For 27/28 add £5,000

11. Monitoring and Governance

Plan delivery will be monitored through:

- Performance monitoring at Growth and Regeneration Executive Directors meeting
- Quarterly financial and performance reporting to leadership and stakeholders.
- Annual Strategic Reviews and work-plans
- Public and stakeholder engagement through forums, digital channels, and participatory planning.
- Internal and external audits to ensure transparency, risk management, and accountability.
- Reporting to Harbour Committee



12. Summary Outlook

By 2031, Bristol Harbour will have transitioned from a subsidised civic facility to a financially independent, vibrant maritime district.

With upgraded infrastructure, diversified income, environmental resilience, and a dynamic cultural presence, the Harbour will stand as a model of urban maritime regeneration secure, inclusive, and ready for the future,

This plan will be formally reviewed every six months to ensure relevance, responsiveness, and progress.

